**Ethnic inequalities in admission to highly selective universities**

Vikki Boliver

*School of Applied Social Sciences, Durham University*

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**Abstract**

Although British ethnic minority students are statistically over-represented in UK universities, some ethnic minority groups remain substantially under-represented in the UK's most selective universities. Studies carried out in the 1990s, 2000s and early 2010s have shown that ethnic minority applicants to highly selective universities were less likely to be offered places than comparably qualified applicants from white British backgrounds. This chapter draws on statistics released for the first time by the Universities Colleges and Admissions Service in 2016 to explore the current extent of ethnic group disparities in university admissions chances after taking prior attainment into account and to ask whether these disparities have declined over time. The chapter considers the possible influence of unconscious bias on university admissions decisions and argues that name-blind admissions is not the best way to tackle it. What is needed instead is determined action on the part of universities to foster an institutional culture in which ethnic biases are confronted and redressed.

**Introduction**

Young people from British ethnic minority backgrounds have been *more likely* than their white British peers to go to university for more than two decades (Modood 1993). By 2010/11, enrolment rates for 18-19 year olds ranged from 37.4% to 75.7% for those from Black Caribbean and Chinese backgrounds respectively, compared to 32.6% for young people from the white British group (Crawford and Greaves, 2015). However, some ethnic minority groups remain significantly under-represented in the UK's most academically selective and prestigious universities. Black Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani students made up just 0.5%, 0.6% and 1.8% of all entrants to the twenty universities that were members of the prestigious Russell Group[1] in 2010-12, despite constituting

[1] The Russell Group purports to represent twenty-four "leading UK universities", specifically the universities of Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Cardiff, Durham, Edinburgh, Exeter, Glasgow, Imperial, King's, Leeds, Liverpool, LSE, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Oxford, Queen Mary,

1.1%, 1.2% and 2.5% of all 15-29 year olds in England and Wales (Boliver 2015a). Young people from Indian, Chinese, and 'Mixed' ethnic backgrounds, in contrast, were found to be well-represented at Russell Group universities in 2010-12 (Boliver 2015a).

Ethnic group differences in rates of participation at highly academically selective universities are driven partly by differences in prior achievement. On average Black Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani students are outperformed at key stages 4 (GCSE) and 5 (A-level) by white British students, who are, in turn, outperformed by students of Chinese and Indian origin (Crawford and Greaves, 2015). But a number of studies point to a further possible cause, namely ethnic bias in admission to highly selective universities. Research drawing on data supplied by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service – the administrative body that processes almost all applications to full-time courses of higher education in the UK – has found that British ethnic minority applicants to highly selective universities in the 1990s, 2000s and early 2010s were less likely to be offered places than white British applicants with the same grades at key stage 5 (Modood and Shiner 1994; Shiner and Modood 2002; Zimdars et al., 2009; Boliver 2013, 2015a & 2016; Noden, Shiner and Modood 2014). One study reported that the rate at which white applicants to Russell Group universities were offered places in 2010-2012 was 7-12 percentage points higher than the rate for equivalently qualified Black Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi applicants, and 3-4 percentage points higher than the rate for equivalently qualified applicants from the Chinese, Indian and 'mixed' ethnic groups (Boliver 2015a). Disparities in offer rates have been shown to persist even after factoring in information about applicants' A-level subject choices and the popularity of their chosen degree programmes (Noden et al., 2014; Boliver 2016), and have been found to be particularly large for courses which attract large numbers of ethnic minority applicants (Boliver, 2016).

Concerns that admissions to highly selective universities may be unfairly biased against ethnic minority applicants have been repeatedly dismissed by the public relations wing of the Russell Group (Russell Group 2013 & 2015), which has pointed out that the studies cited above do not take into

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Queen's Belfast, Sheffield, Southampton, UCL, Warwick and York. The universities of Durham, Exeter, Queen Mary and York joined the Russell Group in 2012. For empirical evidence that the Russell Group universities (excepting Oxford and Cambridge) are in fact no more "leading" than many other 'old' (pre-1992) universities, see Boliver (2015b).

account all information relevant to university admissions, such as the specific academic entry requirements of courses applied to and other indicators of applicant merit besides grades achieved at key stage 5. These are legitimate criticisms; but it is noteworthy that the Russell Group has been content to simply dismiss concerns about possible ethnic bias in admissions as unfounded, rather than call for a more thorough and complete analysis to be undertaken. Notwithstanding the Russell Group's seeming lack of inquisitiveness, it has not been possible in any case for academic researchers to undertake further analysis of UCAS data in order to address the shortcomings of previous research. For the last few years, UCAS has been unwilling to share with academic researchers the detailed, anonymised, individual-level data needed for such analysis, citing concerns about jeopardising applicants' trust in their service (UCAS 2015a). In lieu of sharing data with academic researchers, UCAS issued a press-release in 2013 and an Analysis Note in 2015 reporting that its own in-house analysis had found only small ethnic group differences in offer rates after taking predicted key stage 5 results and choice of degree programme into account (Grove 2013; UCAS 2015b). UCAS noted that these small differences in offer rates could to be attributable to differences in the quality of other aspects of applications besides prior attainment, such as personal statements or performance at interview.

The fact that researchers and policy makers have been unable to access detailed anonymised UCAS data for research purposes for several of years was highlighted by the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission as a major obstacle to identifying and removing the barriers to fair access to higher education (Machin 2015). In response, the UK government announced in its 2016 Higher Education White Paper:

> "We will enhance transparency, opening up data held by the sector, informing choice and promoting social mobility." (DBIS 2016: 41).

More specifically the White Paper set out three important proposals. First, the White paper proposed to "place a duty on institutions to publish application, offer, acceptance and progression rates, broken down by gender, ethnicity and disadvantage". This has prompted the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) to publish for the first time in 2016 detailed statistics on the number of

applications and offers processed by 132 UK universities between 2010 and 2015 (UCAS, 2016a). Section two of this chapter asks what these newly-released statistics tell us about the extent and causes of ethnic group differences in offer rates at a Russell Group universities.

Second, the White Paper proposed to "require those organisations who provide shared central admissions services (such as UCAS) to share relevant data they hold with Government and researchers in order to help improve policies designed to increase social mobility" (DBIS 2016: 41). This has resulted in UCAS revising its data sharing policy, reinstating the ability of accredited researchers to securely access anonymised individual-level application and offer data for the 2016 admissions cycle onwards from 2017 (UCAS 2016b). The greater availability of data on university admissions is a welcome development for researchers and policy-makers keen to understand and address the causes of lower elite university admission rates for ethnic minority students. The close of section two of this chapter discusses what more we will be able to learn once detailed, individual-level applications and admissions data becomes available to researchers again from 2017 onwards.

Third, in response to concerns about the possible influence of unconscious bias and other inadvertently discriminatory practices on admissions decision-making (Boliver 2013, 2015a & 2016; Cameron, 2015), the White Paper reported that the government had "asked UCAS to consult the higher education sector on the feasibility of introducing name-blind applications for prospective students […to…] potentially help reduce unfairness and inequality" (DBIS 2016: 41). UCAS has since published a report on the results of this consultation on name-blind admissions (UCAS 2016c), and it has been announced that name-blind admissions will be trialled for some courses at four UK universities – Exeter, Huddersfield, Liverpool and Winchester – during the 2016/17 admissions cycle (Havergal 2016). Section three of this chapter discusses the likely impact of unconscious bias on university admissions decisions, and challenges the idea that name-blind admissions is the best way to tackle it. The chapter closes by arguing that what is needed instead is determined action on the part of universities to foster an institutional culture in which ethnic biases in university admissions and other domains of university life are confronted and redressed.

**Ethnic group differences in Russell Group university offer rates**

In June 2016 UCAS published for the first time detailed statistics on applications to and admissions offers made by 132 UK universities between 2010 and 2015, broken down by broad ethnic group (UCAS 2016a). Analysis of these statistics reveals two seemingly encouraging trends. First, the absolute number of ethnic minorities receiving a place at a Russell Group university increased by more than 40% in the period between 2010 and 2015, outpacing the rate of growth in the number of White entrants to these universities during the same period.[2] Secondly, offer rates increased by 11 percentage points for Asian applicants to Russell Group universities between 2010 and 2015, and by 14 percentage points for Russell Group applicants from the Black and 'mixed' ethnic groups, indicating that when ethnic minority students apply to Russell Group universities they are more likely to get in than ever before.

However, these trends may not be as encouraging as they first appear. Much of the increase in the number of British ethnic minority entrants to Russell Group universities is due to the fact that the number of *applications* submitted to Russell Group universities by students from ethnic minority backgrounds increased by some 22 percent between 2010 and 2015, whereas the number of applications from white students declined by half a percent during the same period. Moreover, much of the rise in offer rates for ethnic minority applicants to Russell Group university is due to the fact that these universities are now admitting a higher proportion of *all* applicants than in the past: 64% of all applications were met with an offer of a place in 2015, compared to just 53% in 2010, with offer rates rising for white applicants as well as for ethnic minority applicants, by some 11 percentage points. So while there are more ethnic minority students applying to and entering Russell Group universities than ever before, and while ethnic group differences in offer rates have become slightly less unequal in recent years, offer rates nevertheless remain substantially lower for ethnic minority applicants to Russell Group universities than for white applicants to these universities. In 2015, the offer rate was 67% for white applicants to Russell Group universities considered collectively, compared to 63% for applicants from 'mixed' ethnic backgrounds, 54% for Asian applicants, 49% for those from 'other' ethnic groups, and just 41% for Black applicants. The question remains, therefore, whether ethnic minority applicants are as likely to be offered places at Russell Group universities as comparably qualified white applicants.

[2] All statistics in this section based aggregate data published by in UCAS in June 2016, authors' own calculations.

It is clear from the UCAS statistics cited above that there is a large 'raw gap' between offer rates for white applicants to Russell Group universities and those for applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds. But it is important to also calculate the 'net gap' in offer rates; that is, the difference in offer rates after taking into account the fact that the degree programmes chosen by ethnic minority applicants tend to be more heavily oversubscribed than is the case for white applicants, and that some ethnic minority groups apply with prior attainment levels that are lower (Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi applicants) or higher (Chinese, Indian and 'mixed' ethnicity applicants) than their white peers (Boliver 2016). Helpfully, the UCAS statistics also include what they term 'average offer rates' for the sub-set of applicants who applied to university straight from school at age 18. 'Average offer rates' describe the offer rate for all applicants, irrespective of ethnicity, whose chose the same degree programmes and applied with the same predicted key stage 5 grades as members of the ethnic group in question. Taking the difference between average offer rates and raw offer rates gives us the size of the 'net gap' between offer rates for white as compared to ethnic minority applicants; that is, the size of the gap after taking differences in course choice and predicted key stage 5 attainment into account. If there is a substantial 'net gap' in offer rates, this could be considered *prima facie* evidence of the possibility of some form of ethnic bias in admissions.

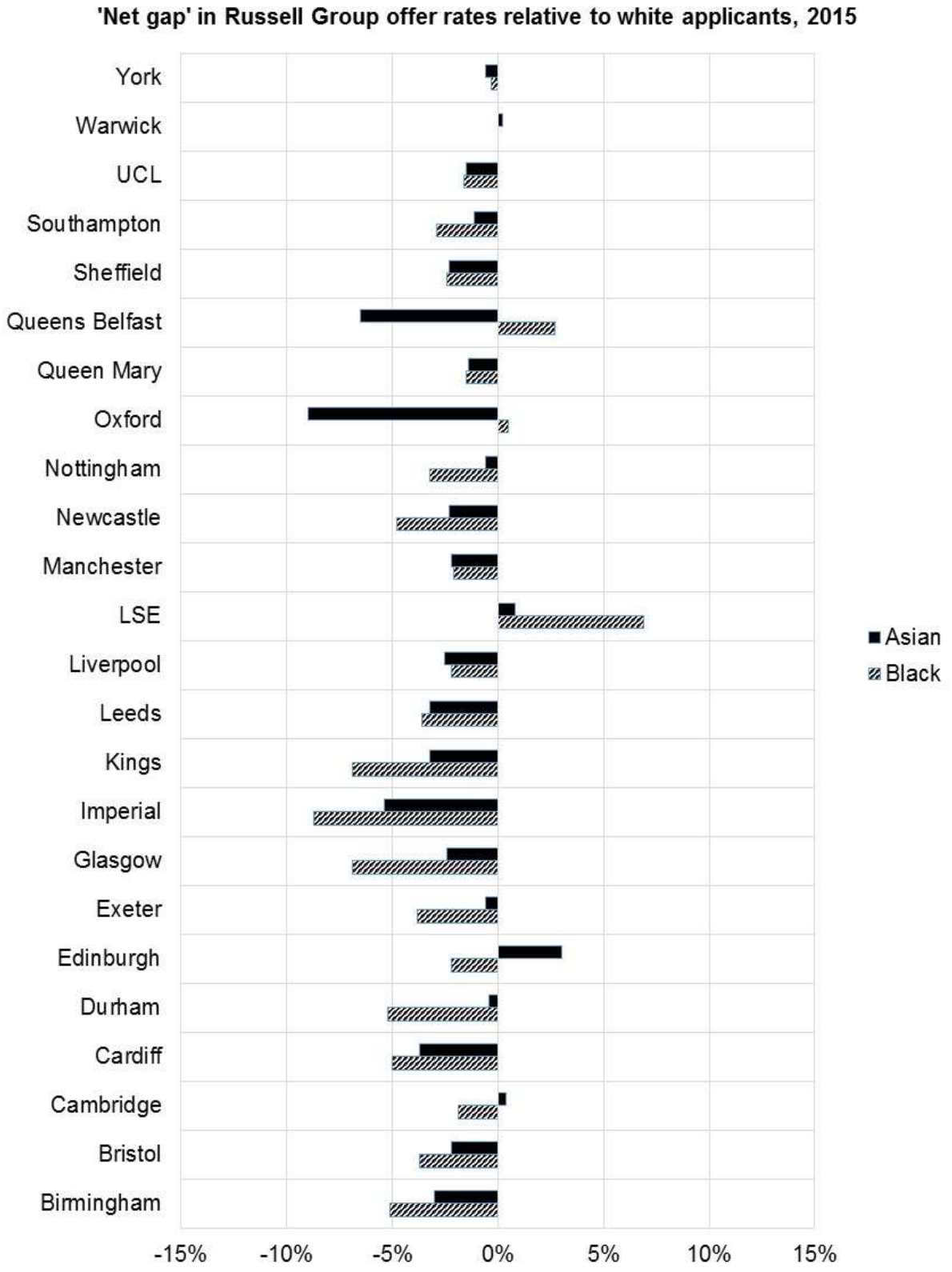
Looking across the UK university sector as a whole, the 'net gap' in offer rates appear modest. Average offer rates are 1.6 percentage points lower for Asian applicants than for white applicants, 3 percentage points lower for Black applicants, 0.6 percentage points lower for 'mixed' ethnicity applicants, and 2.3 percentage points lower for applicants from 'other' ethnic minority groups. Commenting on the size of the 'net gap' in offer rates across the UK university sector as a whole, UCAS stated that "the offer-making process operated by universities is broadly fair" (UCAS 2016a).

The Russell Group put it more strongly, claiming that "New analysis from UCAS finds no evidence of bias in the admissions system" (Russell Group 2016a). However, as Figure 1 below shows, the 'net gap' is rather larger for some Russell Group universities than for the sector as a whole. For Asian applicants, the 'net gap' in offer rates relative to white applicants is a substantial 5.4 percentage points at Imperial College London, 6.5 percentage points at Queens Belfast, and 9 percentage points

at the University of Oxford. For Black applicants, the 'net gap' in offer rates relative to white applicants is 5 percentage points at Birmingham University and Cardiff University, 7 percentage points at Glasgow University and Kings College London, and 8.7 percentage points at Imperial College London.[3] Moreover, the vast majority of the data points in Figure 1 (40 out of 48) evidence a 'net gap' (of various magnitudes) in favour of white applicants.

[3] Bars for 'other ethnicity' applicants are not shown in Figure 1. However, a similar pattern is evidence, with a 'net gap' for 'other ethnicity' applicants relative to white applicants of 5.4 percentage points at Manchester University, 6 percentage points at Southampton University, and nearly 10 percentage points at the University of Oxford and Imperial College London. Bars for 'mixed ethnicity' applicants are also not shown in Figure 1. For 'mixed ethnicity' applicants the 'net gap' is generally smaller, typically less than 2 percentage points.

Figure 1.



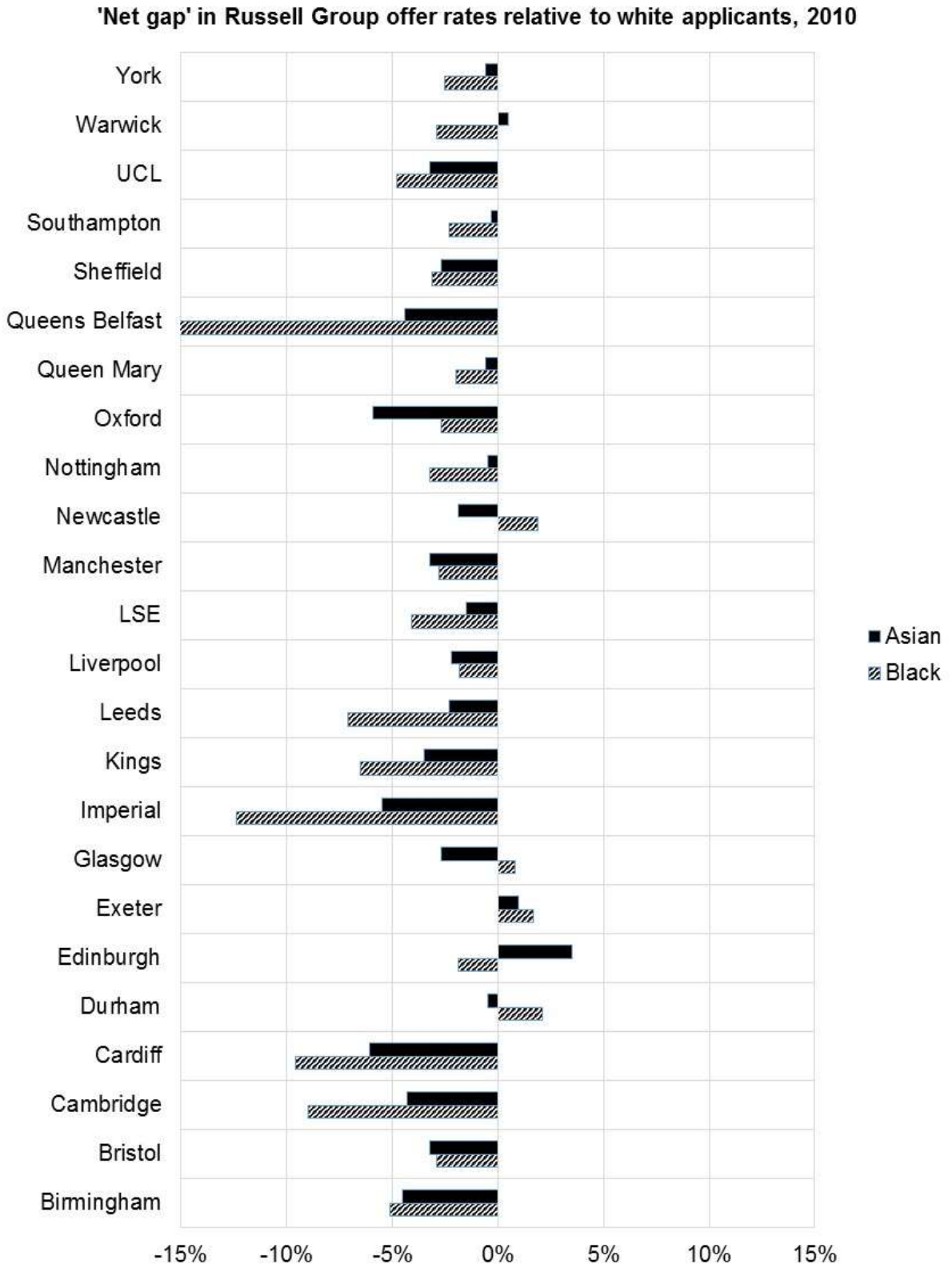

Source: UCAS (2016a)

While Figure 1 shows that overall net gaps in offer rates for different ethnic groups were substantial for many Russell Group universities in 2015, it is also clear that a small number of universities had overall net gaps that were effectively zero – notably Cambridge, Durham, Exeter, LSE, Nottingham, Warwick and York in relation to the net gap between Asian and white applicants; and for Oxford, Warwick and York in relation to the net gap between black and white applicants. Figure 1 also shows that at one Russell Group university – the LSE – the net gap in fact favoured black applicants over white applicants. These anomalies beg the question: has the equitableness of admission to these and other Russell Group universities improved in recent years?

Because the UCAS statistics stretch back to 2010 it is possible to compare the size of the net gaps in offer rates for 2015 to the size of the net gaps five years previously. Figure 2, below, displays the net gaps as they were in 2010. Comparing Figure 2 to Figure 1, it is clear that most Russell Group universities were doing rather worse by ethnic minority applicants in 2010 than they were by 2015, including several of the universities that were anomalous in 2015 for having net gaps that were negligible (e.g. York and Warwick) or which favoured ethnic minority applicants (LSE). It is not obvious what has caused net gaps in offer rates to become smaller over time. One possibility is that ethnic minority applicants to these universities are better qualified than they were in the past. Another possibility is that these universities have begun to take seriously concerns about ethnic bias in admissions and have begun to take the steps needed to address them. This second possibility is an encouraging thought, but it is clear that more needs to be done to fully equalise offer rates for comparably qualified applicants from different ethnic groups.

It is important to appreciate that the 'net gaps' in offer rates presented in Figures 1 and 2 relate only to those who applied to university straight from school at age 18. This is important because only two-thirds of all applications to Russell Group universities in 2015 came from 18 year olds, whereas one third were submitted by those aged 19+ after taking a 'gap year' or a longer break from education before returning as a mature student. Given that the raw gap in offer rates is somewhat larger for applicants aged 19+ than it is for applicants aged 18 (UCAS 2016a), it seems likely that including applicants of all ages in the calculation of 'net gaps' would paint a rather bleaker picture.

Figure 2.




Source: UCAS (2016a)

It is also important to note that the 'net gaps' in offer rates presented in Figures 1 and 2 are averages for each institution as a whole. As such, they tell us nothing about the equitableness or otherwise of offer rates for specific degree programmes. This matters because ethnic minority applicants are known to choose some areas of study at much higher rates than their white peers, including Medicine and Dentistry, Computer Science, Law, and Business and Administration, and previous research has shown that the net gap in offer rates is particularly large for courses which attract disproportionately high numbers of ethnic minority applicants (Boliver, 2016). This suggests that there may be substantial net gaps in offer rates for particular courses even for universities for which the overall net gap in offer rates is small or non-existent.

As discussed earlier, from 2017, researchers will be permitted once more to access in anonymised form the individual-level applications and admissions data held by UCAS. Access to this data will enable researchers to examine the equitableness of offer rates for applicants of all age groups, not just 18 year olds, and to drill down to the level of specific degree programmes at each institution, in addition to examining the patterns for each institution overall. Access this this data will also enable researchers to investigate whether ethnic group differences in offer rates are related to corresponding differences in performance at GCSE, given that some universities use this as an additional selection criterion; choice of key stage 5 qualification, given that some universities prefer A-level qualifications over more vocational qualifications such as BTEC and Access to Higher Education courses; choice of subjects at A-level, given that some courses stipulate A-level subject requirements and others prefer so-called 'facilitating subjects' (Russell Group 2016b); and mismatches between applicants' predicted and achieved grades at key stage 5, given that offers of university places are typically made before applicants' achieved grades are known. All of the factors listed above may be working to the detriment of ethnic minority applicants' chances of gaining a place at a highly selective university.

**Unconscious bias, name-blind admissions, and fostering an inclusive institutional culture**

While ethnic group differences in offer rates from Russell Group universities have improved over time, several universities clearly continue to have substantial overall net gaps, and it seems likely that net gaps also exist for specific degree programmes within universities, possibly even for institutions with negligible net gaps overall. Until individual-level UCAS data becomes available again for more

detailed analysis, the possibility of ethnic bias on the part of admissions decision-makers cannot be ruled out.

The possibility of 'unconscious bias' on the part of decision-makers has been raised by the higher education sector's equalities body the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU 2013), and by the former Prime Minister David Cameron MP (Cameron 2015), as a likely cause of unequal offer rates for different ethnic groups. The Equality Challenge Unit defines unconscious bias as:

> "a term used to describe the associations that we hold which, despite being outside our conscious awareness, can have a significant influence on our attitudes and behaviour. Regardless of how fair minded we believe ourselves to be, most people have some degree of unconscious bias. The means that we automatically respond to others (eg people from different racial or ethnic groups) in positive or negative ways. These associations are difficult to override, regardless of whether we recognise them to be wrong, because they are deeply ingrained into our thinking and emotions (ECU 2013: 1)

The Equality Challenge Unit also uses the term 'implicit bias' to refer to the stereotypes that may continue to influence peoples' attitudes and behaviour even after they become more aware of them (i.e. as they become less 'unconscious'). As the Equality Challenge Unit makes clear, recognising that unconscious or implicit bias may affect decision-making "must not replace an acknowledgment that explicit bias and discrimination exist and continues to be an issue in the higher education sector" (ECU 2013: 4). However, it is unconscious and implicit forms of bias that are currently in the spotlight.

There is a significant degree of scope for unconscious bias to be at play when it comes to university admissions decisions, particularly for courses which attract a high ratio of well-qualified applicants per course places available. This is because although information about applicants' ethnic origins is *not* shared with universities prior to admissions decisions being made, admissions selectors do see a range of other information that are likely to give clues as to ethnic origin (and gender and social class background). Admissions selectors see each applicant's name, which may connote membership of a particular ethnic group, particularly for Asian applicants but also potentially for applicants from the Black Caribbean and Black African groups. Admissions selectors see each applicant's home address and the school they attend, which may also be suggestive of ethnicity given the high degree of residential concentration of British ethnic minority communities (although this has been decreasing

over time, see Catney 2015). Admissions selectors also see what an applicant says about themselves in their personal statements, where language use or references made to personal experiences and interests may also signal an applicant's ethnicity. For courses which require shortlisted applicants to attend a formal interview, an applicant's ethnicity (and gender and social class) are of course likely to be highly visible. These signals as to an applicant's ethnicity may lead admissions selectors to make biased decisions, perhaps based on an unconscious association of the applicant with societal stereotypes about their ethnic group, or an unconscious preference for recruiting students in their own (typically white upper-middle-class) image (ECU: 2013).

There is evidence from labour market studies that applicant names do influence selection decisions. A UK study commission by the Department for Work and Pensions found that job applicants with White British sounding names were more likely to be shortlisted than applicants with names more commonly associated with British ethnic minority groups (Wood et al 2009). These findings echo the results of many similar studies in the US (see for example Pager 2009). The evidence in relation to higher education admissions is more limited than that for job hiring. However, in the UK, a now-dated study of medical school admissions found that applicants from ethnic minority groups were 1.46 times less likely to be accepted even when qualifications and other factors were taken into account, and that those with non-European-sounding surnames were less likely to be offered places than other applicants with comparable qualifications (McManus *et al.*, 1995). More recent experimental evidence from the US found that identical emails from prospective postgraduate students were more likely to receive a response from US college professors if the sender's name indicated they were white rather than African American, Hispanic, Indian or Chinese (Milkman, Akinola and Chugh 2015).

In response to concerns about the possibility of unconscious bias in university admissions, the UK government has advocated that UCAS applications should be name-blind (Cameron 2015, DBIS 2016). But would simply removing applicants' names mitigate the possible influence of unconscious bias on university admissions decisions? Even if it would, is it enough?

UCAS was tasked with consulting the higher education sector about the proposal and reported its findings and recommendations in August 2016 (UCAS 2016c). UCAS reported that respondents to

the consultation raised concerns about the efficacy of simply removing applicant names from the top of application forms given that names are likely to appear elsewhere on the form, for example in an applicant's email address or teacher's reference, and given that other information provided could still provide clues as to an applicant's ethnicity, including the applicant's home address, school attended, personal statement, qualifications taken in another language, and so on. Respondents also expressed concerns that going name-blind would prove detrimental to attempts to take positive action to support applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds and other under-represented groups, for example by making it more difficult to use contextual data in admissions or to target 'conversion' activities focused on encouraging applicants from under-represented groups to accept offers of places.

These criticisms of name-blind admissions notwithstanding, UCAS's first of seven recommendations was that name-blind admissions should be piloted locally by higher education providers, so as to "test its applicability to HE admissions, its efficacy in addressing concerns about unconscious bias, and to better understand the likely costs of a widespread implementation" (UCAS 2016c: 15). It was subsequently announced that name-blind admissions trials would be implemented for selected courses at the universities of Exeter, Huddersfield, Liverpool and Winchester during the 2016/17 admissions cycle.[4] This may yield useful quasi-experimental data, but it is unlikely to lead to name-blind admissions being rolled out nationally because of the impracticalities mentioned above.

But more importantly, even if it was practicable to disguise applicants' ethnic backgrounds on their UCAS application forms, such a move would fail to address the underlying causes of any ethnic bias in offer making. If admissions decisions *are* influenced by conscious or unconscious bias, then the solution is not to remove information that triggers those biases, but to develop processes and foster cultures in which such biases are recognised and redressed, and not just at the point of admissions, but across all domains of university life. Name-blind admissions, even if it could be done, would not be enough.

[4] At Exeter, Huddersfield, Liverpool at Winchester in 2015, the overall net gap in offer rates between Black and white applicants was 3.7, 1.6, 2.7, and 2.2 percentage points respectively, while that between Asian and white applicants was 0.5, 4.5, 2.4 and 1.0 percentage points respectively.

**Developing genuinely inclusive practices and cultures within the academy**

Rather attempting to disguise the ethnicity of university applicants, whether by removing names from UCAS forms or by other means, universities need to face the problem of possible unconscious bias more frontally. This means universities looking closely and critically not only at current practices within the university, but also at the wider institutional culture.

In terms of practices, universities could provide equality and diversity and unconscious bias training to those involved in the selection of students. Many universities already train staff to understand and follow equalities legislation, and to be recognise and take steps to mitigate unconscious bias, when recruiting to academic and administrative posts within the university. This kind of training could be rolled out to those involved in the selection of students, drawing on the unconscious bias training materials produced for the higher education sector by the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU 2013). Encouragingly, Supporting Professionalism in Admissions has produced a good practice guide focusing specifically on university admissions (SPA 2015), and has begun offering unconscious bias training courses to universities nationally, in line with UCAS's second recommendation to the sector.

UCAS has also recommended that universities institute a system of double-checking rejected applications (UCAS recommendation 4); that they proactively monitor their own admissions data throughout the admissions cycle with a view to identifying and addressing any illegitimate gaps in offer rates by ethnic group (UCAS recommendation 3); that they engage in and with research examining whether and if so how unconscious bias influences admissions decisions (recommendation 5); and that they consider what other steps may need to be taken to address ethnic disparities in admissions chances where they occur (recommendation 7).

Unlike the proposal for name-blind UCAS forms, the above recommendations from UCAS would be steps in the right direction. But it is notable that they focus exclusively on institutional practices, with little said about wider institutional cultures. This is problematic given that ethnic inequalities in higher are not confined to admissions, but are evident in all domains of university life. Research shows that ethnic minority students and staff commonly experience institutional and personal racism within the

academy, both subtle and overt (NUS 2011; Pilkington 2011). Moreover, ethnic minority students graduate with significantly lower marks on average than white students who entered university with the same A-level grades, with rates of achieving a first or upper second class degree around fifteen percentage points lower for students from ethnic minority backgrounds as compared to comparably qualified white students (HEFCE 2015). It is also clear that ethnic minorities are significantly under-represented among academics working in UK universities and face institutional bias when applying for academic jobs and for internal promotion (Arday 2015; Bhopal and Jackson 2013). All of this indicates that ethnic bias within UK universities, unconscious or otherwise, is not confined to admissions decision-making but is widespread. This in turn indicates that the solution requires change not only to institutional processes, but to wider institutional cultures too.

If unconscious ethnic bias exists in the academy (and all the more so if conscious ethnic bias exists), there is an urgent need for universities to work harder to actively foster an institutional culture which is genuinely inclusive and which genuine values diversity. Researchers have documented the failure of equality and diversity policies which focus on institutional practices but do not address institutional cultures; the mere existence of equality and diversity policy documents has been noted to foster the illusion that problems have been dealt with, and to result in continuing bias and discrimination being ignored or downplayed (Pilkington 2011; Ahmed 2015). More is needed besides good intentions on paper even where these result in piecemeal changes to practice.

A valuable model of how universities can begin to develop genuinely inclusive institutional cultures is provided by the Equality Challenge Unit through its development of a Race Equality Charter since 2012. Application to ECU for Charter membership requires unequivocal recognition of the fact that ethnic inequalities in higher education exist and that long-term institutional cultural change is needed to remedy them, together with a commitment from the Vice-Chancellor and senior management team to take action.[5] Participating universities can then work towards a Race Equality Chartermark which is awarded to institutions that are able to demonstrate how their commitment to these principles translate *effectively* into practice. So far, only 25 of the UK's 130+ higher education institutions have signed up to the Charter, and just 8 have met the standard required to receive a first-level (bronze)

[5] http://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/race-equality-charter/about-race-equality-charter/

Charter Mark award. Widespread take-up of Race Equality Charter membership in the future offers one of the best hopes of successfully tackling ethnic bias within higher education in admissions and beyond.

**Biography**

Vikki Boliver is Reader in Sociology and Social Policy in the School of Applied Social Sciences at Durham University. Her research focuses on ethnic and social class disparities in admission to Russell Group universities, the institutional stratification of the UK higher education sector, the use of contextualised admissions policies to widen participation in higher education, and patterns and processes of social mobility over multiple generations.

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